

REMARKS

Reconsideration and allowance are respectfully requested.

Claims 40-50 are pending. The brief description of the drawings and the claims are amended for clarity.

Applicants submit that the arguments presented against the pending objections and rejections of the claims still apply after these clarifying amendments, and the Examiner is thus respectfully requested to consider the remarks contained in the Amendment filed December 20, 2006. Furthermore, Applicants note that the opposition in the European Patent Office (EPO) to their Application No. EP 97913336.0 was decided in favor of patentability, and the opposer's appeal is now withdrawn. The papers filed at the EPO in the corresponding European patent application are available online to the public. The prior art documents submitted in the EPO have already been made of record in this application; if the Examiner would prefer to have paper copies of the rest of the opposition/appeal submitted for her consideration, she is invited make such a request in her response.

Applicants submit that the claims are in condition for allowance and earnestly solicit an early Notice to that effect. But if the amendments and remarks made here and on December 20, 2006 are deemed insufficient by the Examiner to result in withdrawal of the claim rejections, an interview is requested to discuss any remaining issues.

Respectfully submitted,

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